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## FARM AND HOME VISITS

### Why and How We Make Them

All extension workers make visits to farm homes. They have to, to be effective. Productive farm and home visits are an essential part of successful extension work.

Face to face discussions and on-the-spot examinations lead to joint consideration and a cooperative decision. This is the route by which we apply the lessons of the past, think inventively toward the future, and build the road to progress with the cement of hope.

Extension workers try to reach all the people. A personal, on-the-farm discussion is the only way that certain families can be reached. There are many reasons, good reasons, why these families do not participate in extension work. The important fact for us is that "what you aren't up on you are down on." A well-planned visit to one of those homes is a way to show that family that you are interested in them, that you do care, and that in turn the community needs and wants their help. It is often the only route by which the county program can be extended to them.

The key position of visits in the teaching program is realized by all extension people. They understand the importance of personal conversations in promoting the rapid adoption of useful farm and home practices. Visits are essential. The extension worker's personal problem is to fit these time-consuming calls into a busy schedule. Happily, not all the useful visits must be made by an extension worker. If his personal discussions are strategic enough they will stimulate more talk among the neighbors. Visits are not just an extension worker's tool, they are the chief teaching method of all the people. Used by the community, they are usually more effective than when we use them.

### The Teaching Problem

Alexander Pope has told us:

"Be not the first by which the new are tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside."

Many people follow Mr. Pope's advice. They want to improve. They know their methods can be improved. They read, hear, wonder and wait. They hesitate to try the new. They cling to the familiar old.

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Making a change in the method of farming carries an economic hazard. It will reduce income if, for example, the new variety of seed does not produce as well as the old. Change also carries a social hazard. If the "new" does not pay, the neighbors will think them foolish. They will lose their hard earned status; they will have to hear a whole series of "I told you so's."

A few people push ahead without waiting. They hear or read about an improved way to do a job. They investigate further. They figure how this idea can be adapted to their conditions. They have enough confidence in their own judgment to go ahead and try it out. They might be called pioneers.

When these "pioneers" have shown that the method is practical, when they have "grown" the proof, it would seem that the rest would "lay the old aside." Usually they don't. They still need to think about it, more especially they need to talk about it.

The tendency of most people is to cling to the old until they have had a chance to discuss the matter thoroughly. They seek personal, face-to-face visits with those who know and with their neighbors. They "test the wind." They make their personal canvass of public opinion. Almost everyone is governed by what his public thinks.

#### Original Use of Visits

When Extension was new, the county workers called on farm families to get acquainted with the people and the situation; to explain the objectives of this new work; to discover what activities would be of greatest service. As farm people began to understand this "county agent business" their first requests to the agent were for help in identifying insects, culling poultry, pruning trees, using a pressure canner.

County and home agents capitalized on these service calls to learn their county problems and their county people more intimately; to establish test plots or result demonstrations which proved that the "book learning" of the faraway experiment station had practical application locally. The agents' new friends might doubt that treating oat seed with formaldehyde would kill the smut spores and increase the yield, but you were a nice, sincere chap and if you wanted to come out and help with all that extra work they would try it out. Most of these farm people had more confidence, at first, in the agent than in his formaldehyde or his school learned ideas. When they discovered on these visits that the agent could handle a 4-horse hitch and use a grain scoop it added to their willingness to try out what he proposed.

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### Use of Visits Today

As the formaldehyde, hen culling, tree pruning and pressure canner proved themselves, meetings were called, demonstrations were given and more time was taken up with office calls and writing news notes. Visits became a less featured part of the activity. They had to be. There was less time to devote to them. That is the situation today. Personal face-to-face discussions are one of the very best ways to exchange ideas. They are essential in reaching many farm families. They are most useful in propagating constructive neighborhood visits. Yet they consume much time. Visits are similar to leisure; nice to have, even though you are too busy to use it.

### Types of Visits

Classifying visits by type or kind can be helpful in deciding whether or not to make one. For example: on your desk one winter afternoon you find a note from your efficient secretary. "Don Hall called to ask about fertilizer for his hill pasture. Wants to order soon. Asked you to drop by and look it over." If a pasture improvement demonstration is needed in that community; if Don Hall has children who should be in club work; if the home agent is still trying to interest Mrs. Hall in joining the home demonstration club; if Don Hall, his family and his farm have possibilities that you hope to develop a chapter at a time; if any of these or a combination of them is in the picture, should you make the requested visit?

But you know easy-going Don. You know his hill; you know his fertilizer needs; and so you phone or write: "Your call about fertilizer ---. Knowing you will want to order this before I can stop by, I hasten to --- etc."

Let's look at another situation. Mrs. Schmidt has attended one or two community meetings but neither she nor her neighbors have ever really taken part in the homemakers' program. One day you meet Mrs. Schmidt accidentally on the street. She tells you she has heard about these modern, convenient kitchens; wishes hers could be fixed up; wonders if you could get her some information; even drop by and see her kitchen. You will go. You will spare no effort to give her help that she will remember gratefully.

Mrs. Schmidt and her kitchen make a combination service and get-acquainted visit. It would be natural for you, that first day on the street, to inquire if some of Mrs. Schmidt's neighbors were interested in kitchens too; if some of them might drop in while you are there so that the problems of remodeling could be discussed together. That could be a good idea or a bad one. It would be good if Mrs. Schmidt and her neighbors are community-minded. It could be bad if Mrs. Schmidt likes to set the pace, to stay in front, to surprise her friends. The group meeting, the neighborhood effort, your hopes for a new homemakers' club may have to wait until Mrs. Schmidt absorbs some of your philosophy and enthusiasm.



There is another situation where personal farm and home visits can be crucial. You decide whether this is one of them.

For a long time Jim had known that his three children were not too happy on the farm. They were good kids. They did their work around the place, but Jim had seen the eager light in their eyes when the bus carried them off to school, had heard the eager tones in their voices when they phoned from town to ask if they could stay down for this or that. Normal, for high school kids, he supposed, but both he and his wife noticed and discussed this problem the many evenings they were alone. Jim said: "Spring is no fun for either of the boys. They take no pleasure in this starting of something new. They see only dust and sweat ahead. They look forward not to harvest, but to hot sun and tired backs. They scare the hens, they kick the pigs, they growl at the cows. They even growl at me. I guess they think I am pretty slow or dumb or stubborn. They tell me occasionally about the difference between my farm and Bill Johnson's."

A long silence...then from Jim's wife: "We have discussed that difference too -- couldn't we do something about it?"

Here are the urgent wants, many of them. The farm wants many things. So does the house. But mostly it is the family that wants, that hungers for that close-knit, united, shoulder-to-shoulder push ahead. Sweat and tired backs are minor if the step is forward; if they mean progress toward a chosen, wished-for goal. Milking time is achievement time as the milk scales record the excellence of that new pasture or those better bred heifers. Cooking meals is a triumph when the peas and strawberries make credit marks in the 4-H record. Who is too tired to repaint the kitchen so Mom can enjoy giving the home demonstration club a taste of her special fruit salad?

Progress, achievement, prestige, companionship; faith that tomorrow will be better than today because we make it so -- these are the things that family wants. Complicated? Yes, but not impossible. Can you, an extension worker, guide this family toward the action that will bring the satisfactions that it craves? Would a visit be the way to start?

#### Classification of Visits

We started out to classify farm and home visits into their respective types. Those types could be:

1. Service - Somebody has an acute problem and wants you to apply a quick remedy.
2. Analytical - Somebody is in trouble and wants you to help figure out the answers.
3. Teaching - Somebody has a problem and wants you to teach him a new fact or skill.



4. Public Relations - The stop to get acquainted or to obtain some local information.
5. Organizational - To start a demonstration; help in the progress of one already under way; lend encouragement; plan a meeting; locate new local leaders; obtain suggestions, ad infinitum.
6. Combination: - A mixture of two or more of the above.
7. Farm and Home Development - They can begin like any of the others but they lead into a series that plods purposefully and persistently into and through the farm and home problems to the family's objectives.

All types of visits are common to extension work. The last three (often by-products of the others) are the ones that usually yield the greatest service to the county.

#### Whom To Visit

When your county planning committee sets the goals for next year they will hand your county office a series of sound, useful, general suggestions. One could guess that they will recommend that you continue work on soil improvement, higher yields of high quality crops, weed and disease eradication and more efficient marketing. The home program will stress nutrition, more convenient household arrangements, clothing, landscaping, and child care. There will be emphasis on work with young folks. Community cooperation and development will also be included. Your job will be to put more wheels under these objectives and keep them rolling.

Your recommendations from the planning committee are to push this program. Those from the State office are to reach all the people. Your own inner urge is to make a real contribution of which you can be proud. Where will personal visits help with all of these?

Every county contains a variety of farm situations and farm people. There are large farms and small, extensive operations and specialized farming, prosperous farms and those that are pushed to keep going.

People vary too. There are those who are eager to try a new way. There are many conservative operators and still others who don't like to change at all. Some are leaders in their community. There are others who always follow. There are whole families who take part in all community activities; those who come out occasionally and others who have never heard of extension work even after forty years. You are supposed to reach them all. How can you use visits? Where do you need them? Who can handle the ones you won't have time to make?

### Preparing for a Visit

First on your list of visits will be the ones you can't avoid, the emergencies, the special, urgent requests. With the rest of your program well in mind maybe some of these service calls can be converted into a combination or organizational visit or even into the beginnings of a farm and home development series.

Some of these special calls will give you your greatest satisfactions. The aged couple with red spider in their shrubs; the young mother with tomatoes spoiling on the vine; the suburban parents with a boy who needs an outdoor job; the part-time farmer whose cow is down with milk fever; the trusting couple about to put their savings into an unproductive farm. Small people all, with no apparent link to your main program. But you will be glad you went. You will be glad you are an extension worker.

Second will be the organizational visit to obtain a new 4-H or project leader, to interest your host (or hostess) in serving on a committee or conducting a demonstration or being chairman of a local meeting. Preparation is needed for this visit even though you know the person well. Preparation is essential when your acquaintance is only casual.

In preparing for these organizational visits it is well to recall that people accept these extra tasks because they satisfy some very human wants. Among those wants are the desire:

1. To have place and status - to be sought out for advice and help.
2. To help plan and be a useful part of community affairs.
3. To do something which the neighbors approve - to which, modestly, they can "point with pride."
4. To help their own family and children.
5. To be of service to others.
6. To learn new things in both technical and social fields.
7. Occasionally - to run things, to be top dog, to outdo a neighbor.

People have reasons too for refusing requested cooperation. Among these normal reasons are:

1. It's too much work - no time.
2. I don't know how - no information or skill.
3. Shyness - I might fail and be embarrassed.
4. No baby sitter.
5. No transportation.

You know, as you drive nearer to this farmstead, that your job is to stimulate those natural wants and overcome those normal fears. In this case will your most effective appeal be to his desire for new experiences, for recognition, for service, or what? How will you reply if he says he is too busy or doesn't know how? What will you say if you sense his desire to step into the limelight, battling with his fear that he might become an unhappy target if he fails?

Before you turn into the driveway, remember you can't do the persuading job alone. Your host will have to do much of it himself. All you can do is help him consider fully.

Your friendly attitude, your sincere interest in him and his, your broad description of the neighborhood needs will start the visit. Then, before too long comes your strategic silence when your friend begins to talk, to describe his situation, problems, hopes. His comments blaze the path through the forest of facts and emotions. He marks the trail. Your job is to follow with understanding; to watch for places where the path can be made smoother; to call attention to inspiring "overlooks" he may have missed - his neighbors who have found new satisfying friends and skills; to accompany him to "Decision Hill" where, with everything spread out before you, you both agree the job needs doing; that he is an important part in doing it.

Another call could be the public relations visit. You need the support of this family and neighborhood. You need to know more about them and their interests. You need to have them talking about you and the program when they visit among themselves. On this call you may have to "play by ear" but you can produce better harmony:

1. If you are as familiar as possible with their place, their activities and their interests, especially their interests, the things that mean most to them.
2. If you have some mutual friends.
3. If your carefully selected questions prove your sincere interest in their work and their opinions.
4. If, in your conversation, you can get them to reason their way to a new, useful idea.
5. If they know that they have given you some fact or method that you think valuable and will use or publicize.
6. If you both enjoyed the visit and hope you meet again.

There are some routine preparations for all visits. As a county agent you will need a sharp pocket knife, a magnifying glass, a small saw, pruning shears, a veterinary thermometer, spray recommendations and schedules, feed formulae, a gestation table, a level, assorted leaflets, a list of available publications, and what else your experience has proved desirable. Being prepared to do the unexpected adds to your usefulness and your stature.

In the trunk of the home agent's car will be nutrition charts, sample menus, a recipe book, cooking and canning schedules, color charts, sample fabrics, a kitchen floor plan, blue print of a homemade closet, a book of children's games, sewing samples, a 4-H project book, to name just a few.

All this is not extra baggage. It is to save extra trips.



### Making a Visit

Just a few more words about making a visit.

Do your local leaders know you are calling in their neighborhood?

Local chairmen, project leaders and especially 4-H leaders appreciate being partners to activities affecting their responsibilities. Often they can help. Sometimes they can go along. Always they enjoy being remembered and considered.

When you make a visit you are a guest. Unexpected guests can be most inconvenient. So can expected guests who fail to adapt themselves to the family's current plans, or those who stay too long.

Another thing, every family has pride in what it owns, a remodeled kitchen, a new barn, a newly opened flower, a friendly dog. Notice, and take pride in their things too.

Be sure, before you leave, that the purpose of your call and the action each of you agree to take is clearly understood by both of you. You will write down the progress made and the agreement reached when you get back to the office. Writing it into your little book before you leave makes a good summary for you both. It is often helpful to make an extra copy to leave behind.

The farm family wants to do a better job out on the farm and in the community. They want to feel that they are moving toward the security, prestige, and service that will give them and theirs the comfort and social status that we all desire. When you drive away do you leave behind a clear understanding of the way in which they can take another step along this road? Do you leave them with confidence that they and you can take that step together? Do you leave them with enthusiasm for this added effort?

### Did Your Visits Help the County?

When you are back in the office recording the activities of your day, how do you feel about those visits? Your file shows two previous calls at the Smith farm. Do those three visits add up or were they merely hit and miss? Will your person-to-person talks stimulate more informed, inter-neighbor discussions? Will they help develop the public approval that leads to action? Are you making progress or merely working hard?

How do you feel about it?



Farm and Home Visit Record

Place \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Length of Visit \_\_\_\_\_

I. Objectives.

1. What I planned to do.
2. What we accomplished.
3. Future action we agreed to take.

II. Farm and Home Situation.

1. Special interests of family.
2. Special problems of:
  - a. Family.
  - b. Farm and home operations.
  - c. Neighborhood.

III. Summary.

1. Possibilities for participation or leadership in homemakers', agricultural or youth activities.
2. Possibilities for a demonstration, meeting, tour stop, farm and home development family.
3. Could a local leader have made this visit? Or helped? Or handle the follow-up?
4. Will this visit stimulate useful discussion among the neighbors?
5. Was this visit convenient for the family, timely, of proper length, enjoyable?
6. Suggestions to yourself from yourself.





